Policy Glossary & Style Reference

Use this reference to learn about the terms used in policy development and guidelines for writing policies and policy documents. For further explanation of the information below, contact the Finance and Operations Policy Office at (701) 777-4392.

Terms Used In Policy Development

- **Editorial Committee (EC):** An ad hoc committee consisting of well-rounded representation within the University that is formed to write/revise clear and understandable policies and procedures on a given subject. Members are selected by the policy's Responsible Office.

- **Finance & Operations Policy Office (PO):** Office reporting to the Vice President for Finance & Operations. Responsible for overseeing and guiding the policy development process, editing drafts of policy documents, and maintaining a central repository of University policies for the Finance & Operations division.

- **Finance & Operations University Policy:** Official University directive that:
  - Mandates requirements of or provisions for members of the University of North Dakota community, and provides procedures for implementation;
  - Has broad application throughout the University;
  - Enhances the University's mission, reduces institutional risk and/or promotes operational efficiency;
  - Has been endorsed by the President's Cabinet and approved by the President;
  - Is sponsored by the VPFO; and
  - Helps achieve compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

- **Impact Statement:** Brief, confidential document that proposes a new policy. The document describes the background, justification, and the likely impact of the new policy. It is presented to the President's Cabinet.

- **Interim Policy:** Provisional policy document issued when a University policy is needed within a time period too short to complete the process. It is in effect for at least six months with possible extensions of six-month increments.

- **Policy Advisory Group (PAG):** A standing committee with broad University representation, appointed by the Vice President for Finance & Operations. This group is charged with assisting in the formulation of new policies and the revisions of existing policies, and recommending review and endorsement to the President's Cabinet. Typically meets once monthly.

- **Policy Revision Form:** Brief document that proposes revisions to an existing policy or procedure. The document identifies the type of change, the affected policy section(s), and the impact it will have on the University.

- **Policy Statement:** The statement on the front page of a policy document that encapsulates the policy's purpose, specifically its core provisions or requirements.

- **Policy Principles:** An expansion of the Policy Statement, an overview that details the policy's contents, specifically its core provisions or requirements.

- **Policy Procedures:** Specific actions that apply across the University community to fulfill the policy's Principles. An appendix may be beneficial to enhance certain aspects of a Procedure.

- **Proposed Policy:** A University policy in any stage of development, before issuance.

- **President's Cabinet:** A standing committee responsible for the review and endorsement of the Impact Statement and the recommendation of the final draft of a policy to the President for signature.

- **Promulgation:** Official declaration that a policy is in effect.
- **Reason for Policy:** The statement on the front page of policy document that encapsulates why the policy exists. It identifies the institutional risk, University mission or value, or any legal or regulatory requirements the policy addresses.
- **Responsible Office:** The office designated by the Vice President for Finance & Operations or Policy Office to develop and administer a policy, communicate with and train the University community in its requirements, and execute its timely updating and revisions.
- **Stakeholder:** Individual, function, or organization identified in the Impact Statement, whose University role or professional expertise relates to the subject of the policy, and who, therefore, is consulted for comment on its draft.
- **Unit-Level Policies:** Policies within a unit/department that do not meet all of the characteristics of a University policy.
- **University (Official) Policy Document:** The official record of a University policy that is presented in a standard format or template to facilitate consistency, clarity, and conciseness. Official policy documents carry the seal of the University on the first page.
- **University of North Dakota Finance & Operations Policy Library:** A collection of University-wide policies centrally located and available for reference on the Finance & Operations Policy Office website.

Rules for Writing Policies

One of the primary reasons for having only one office overseeing the writing of policies in the Finance & Operations Division is to leverage best practice. Below you will find some general rules about writing policies, followed by guidelines regarding several specific sections contained in an official University policy document.

1. The Finance & Operations Division policy development process was developed for the convenience of use by everyone in the University community. Therefore, it is very important that the language contained in policies is precise, but not formal. Always keep the reader in mind.
2. For clarity, policies should be written in the third person.
3. Do not use words that are not used in common speech. For example, do not use “shall”. Instead, use “must.”
4. Having a policy that cannot be enforced is worse than not having a policy at all. Therefore, do not use the word “ensure,” because the University generally cannot ensure actions of its community members. The term “The University of North Dakota supports an environment where…” is useful in these instances.
5. Whenever possible, use a chart or a table. Visual aids are very valuable tools for policy users.
6. All tables in a policy should be consecutively numbered. The same is true for flowcharts or other visual aids.

Rules for Specific Sections of Policy Documents

Policy Statement

The Policy Statement describes who, what and when. It summarizes what the people involved do, but doesn't describe procedures. It lists who should follow the policy and when it applies. In addition, it may state major conditions or restrictions that apply. It is generally two to four sentences.

Reason for Policy

The Reason for Policy section defines to the reader why the policy is needed. It not only cites any legal or regulatory reasons, it recognizes the legitimate interests of all parties, describes the problem or conflict the policy will resolve, and may include the overall benefits of the policy. It is generally two to four sentences.

Scope of Policy

The Scope of Policy defines who is affected by the policy, who should observe it and follow its procedures, and who must understand it in order to do their job.

Related Information

Related Information should only reference information that is mentioned in the policy. Documents should be hyperlinked whenever possible.

Contacts

The Contacts section identifies to the reader which offices can answer specific questions regarding the policy. Contact information should be as generic (office phone number and department email/website) rather than specific (individual phone number or email) to aid in the longevity of the document.

Definitions

The Definitions section contains a list of terms, and definitions, to help the reader to better understand the policy. Terms should be listed in alphabetical order.

Principles

The Principles section of a policy is an expansion of the Policy Statement, an overview. It allows for a fuller description of the contents than what was possible in the Policy Statement section. Generally one to four paragraphs.

Procedures

A Finance & Operations University policy must contain procedure for compliance. This section will mirror the Responsibilities section which outlines required actions by job function, whereas in the Procedures section, such actions are listed by the tasks themselves.

Forms

The Forms section contains a list all related forms required for compliance. Documents should be referenced how they may be obtained and hyperlinked when possible.

Appendices

Appendices are used for informational material that is helpful, but not directly related to the implementation of the policy. Documents should be listed and attached separately and hyperlinked when possible.

Responsibilities

The responsibilities listed in a University Policy should not contain exhaustive procedures, but broader responsibilities. Each action should be listed as a separate responsibility.